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Direct Democracy: Protest Catalyst or Protest Alternative?

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Abstract This paper presents the first investigation of whether direct democracy supplements or undermines the attendance of demonstrations as a form of protest behavior. A first approach assumes that direct democracy is associated with fewer protests, as they function as a valve that integrates voters' opinions, preferences, and emotions into the political process. A competing hypothesis proposes a positive relationship between direct democracy and this unconventional form of political participation due to educative effects. Drawing on individual data from recent Swiss Electoral Studies, we apply multilevel analysis and estimate a hierarchical model of the effect of the presence as well as the use of direct democratic institutions on individual protest behavior. Our empirical findings suggest that the political opportunity of direct democracy is associated with a lower individual probability to attend demonstrations.

Keywords Direct democracy · Protest behavior · Political participation · Educative effect

Introduction

Public protests and direct political participation by means of direct democratic institutions are two clearly related phenomena: Whenever there is increased protest behavior, the call for more participation through direct democracy quickly follows. Recent protests throughout Europe illustrate such reactions. Particularly in Germany, ordinary citizens took to the streets in great numbers, protesting for

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instance against the infrastructure project "Stuttgart 21" or the nuclear waste transport "Castor." Similar developments can be found in Great Britain, where protesters against retrenchments of higher education made the headlines, and in France, where protests against pension reform were widespread (even by French standards). In these instances it appears that the absence of institutions of direct democracy led to alternative forms of participation such as protests and demonstrations. Taking a "political process" or "political opportunity structure" perspective, direct democracy as a participatory decision-making institution enhances the openness of a political system, helps integrate citizens' preferences and attitudes into the political process, and thus acts as a valve for potential protest (Eisinger 1973; Kitschelt 1986). Moreover, direct democracy fosters a deliberative environment and provides a political discourse that discourages confrontational strategies such as protests (Feld and Kirchgässner 2000; Mutz 2006).

The reverse effect, however, is just as apparent: Whenever there are popular votes, protests and demonstrations occur either in campaigns during the run-up to the vote or as reactions to it. Several recent controversial initiatives illustrate this effect: In Switzerland popular initiatives on the deportation of criminal foreigners and on the ban on constructing minarets; in Germany (local) initiatives on school reform and smoking bans in restaurants; and in California Proposition 8 on the same-sex marriage ban and Proposition 19 on legalizing cannabis. All of these direct democratic processes were accompanied by protests and demonstrations. From a progressive perspective, this corresponds to the educative effect of direct democracy that empowers citizens to get involved in the political process, enhance their ability to form, express and enforce their preferences, and thus act as catalyst for potential protest (Smith and Tolbert 2004).

Our paper evaluates the effect of direct democratic institutions on protest behavior, putting both competing hypotheses to an empirical test. Given the strong presence of protests in the recent public debate and the vigorous call for more direct participation, it is astonishing that this relationship has yet to be investigated scientifically. To date, no study exists that systematically links direct democratic institutions with individual protest behavior. This is even more surprising when one considers that the political opportunity structure approach was formulated in order to explain protest behavior in the first place (Eisinger 1973; Kitschelt 1986). Ever since the literature has investigated political opportunity structures for protests, it commonly holds that the openness of a political system is a crucial determinant for protests (Meyer 2004). Direct democratic institutions, however, are only mentioned indirectly and not explicitly taken into account.[1]

To fill this gap, we test the relationship between direct democracy and protest behavior at the individual level in the Swiss cantons. As most industrialized countries do not or insignificantly apply direct democratic instruments, international comparisons of the effects of direct democracy on protest behavior are difficult. However, the Swiss cantons present a suitable alternative. These 26 sub-national

[1] Kitschelt (1986, p. 68), for example, interprets referendums by anti-nuclear groups as a reason why protest took on an assimilative form in the USA (as opposed to confrontational strategies in the closed systems of France and West Germany). Kriesi and Wisler (1996) show that direct democracy in Switzerland induces movements to use its instruments, thus moderating their action repertoire.

units provide an excellent opportunity to test the impact of direct democracy—one of Switzerland's unique institutional arrangements. While some cantons witness extensive use of direct democratic rights, reflecting a participatory political culture, others are much more strongly oriented toward a purely representative democracy (Vatter 2002). In methodological terms, Switzerland, with its more than two-dozen cantonal units, offers many clear advantages: "Because the Swiss cantons are entities within the same national political system, there are many characteristics which they have in common, and which may therefore be treated as constants" (Lijphart 2002, p. 3). In this sense, the Swiss cantons are particularly well-equipped to meet the demands of a most similar systems research design (Vatter 2002; Vatter and Freitag 2007; Freitag 2006). Given that a real experimental situation cannot be achieved in the context of our research question, the analysis of the Swiss cantons can be seen as the best alternative available (e.g., Lijphart 1975; Przeworski and Teune 1970, 31 et seqq.; Snyder 2001).[2] Moreover, the 26 cantons represent a sufficient number of contextual units for quantitative analysis (Jones 1997; Steenbergen and Jones 2002).

The paper proceeds as follows: First, an overview of direct democracy in the Swiss cantons is presented and the extent of individual attendance of demonstrations is reviewed. Second, we discuss the theoretical considerations and hypotheses regarding the relationship between direct democracy and protest behavior. Following the presentation of the contextual and theoretical background, we introduce the methodology and influencing variables and subject the various hypotheses to the scrutiny of systematic statistical evaluation. The article concludes with a brief discussion of the findings.

Direct Democracy and Protests in the Swiss Cantons

Switzerland has a long tradition of direct democratic participation and a correspondingly wide array of direct democratic institutions on federal, cantonal, and local levels. With regard to cantonal direct democracy, four different institutions can be distinguished: the constitutional initiative; the legislative initiative; the legislative referendum (in optional and mandatory form); and the fiscal referendum (also in optional and mandatory form). In each canton each of these institutions comes with different requirements that make it easier or more

[2] We are of course aware of the fact that a sub-national analysis of Switzerland cannot completely overcome the problems of analyzing the causal effect direct democracy has on protest behavior. While internationally there are not any countries with a similarly high level of direct democracy as in Switzerland, *within* Switzerland we do not have the fully counterfactual outcome, *i.e.,* no direct democracy at all (see Rubin 1974). Focusing on institutional configurations of direct democratic instruments, some cantons exhibit very few opportunities of direct democratic participation and come, compared to other cantons, very close to the counterfactual. Individuals in these cantons can therefore serve as our—non-randomly assigned—control group (Achen 1986; Campbell and Stanley 1963). Moreover, following King et al. (1995, p. 477) it is important for the evaluation of causal explanations in political science to test a given hypothesis in different contexts and confront the respective findings. Because previous research on direct democracy's impact has largely focused on the U.S. states, adding empirical data for the Swiss case can therefore be seen as a further step toward causal inference.

difficult to influence political decisions according to the preferences of each citizen. These requirements consist of the number of signatures needed, the respective time periods allotted to launch initiatives and optional referendums, as well as the financial threshold for fiscal referendums. Reviewing and comparing the requirements of each canton, several authors suggest an index of direct democracy that combines all requirements into a single measure of institutional openness (Stutzer 1999; Stutzer and Frey 2000; Trechsel and Serdült 1999). Fischer (2009) extends (and slightly amends) previous efforts to recent years and to all cantons (including the three so called *Landsgemeinden*). On the other hand, a high presence of direct democratic institutions does not necessarily imply an equally high use of them. Although neither presence nor use can be viewed as entirely independent (Eder et al. 2009), they are not highly correlated with one another in the Swiss case (Stadelmann-Steffen and Vatter 2011). In fact, political elites in Switzerland are assumed to be more responsive to citizens' demands because they anticipate the use of referendums and initiatives in those cantons which allow for a great deal of direct democratic involvement. It could well be that both dimensions differ in terms of their effects on protest behavior. Both the presence of direct democratic institutions and the frequency of the use of initiatives and referendums are therefore taken into account. Table 1 provides an overview of the presence and use of direct democracy in the Swiss cantons for the years 1999–2003; Appendix Table 5 provides descriptive statistics of the index and of the average of direct democratic votes. With respect to institutional design and use of direct democratic instruments, the data illustrates that the Swiss cantons exhibit marked variance in terms of formal legal access to popular rights and their respective exercise.

Protest as "a conceptually distinct set of behaviors" (Eisinger 1973, p. 13) aimed at political action can take on many different forms. In its broadest sense, protest encompasses various unconventional modes of political participation—as opposed to conventional modes like voting, campaigning, or contacting representatives. The distinction between conventional participation and protest has been made starting at the very early stages of research on political action.[3] Many studies conceptualize protest as the willingness of citizens to engage in dissent, such as demonstrations, unofficial strikes, boycotts, petitions, occupation of buildings, and political violence (Adrian and Apter 1995; Barnes and Kasse 1979; Marsh 1977; Opp and Kittel 2010).[4] Noticing recent changes in action repertoires, Norris (2009, 639 et seq.), however, points out that "demonstrations have become mainstream and widespread. […] Today, collective action through demonstrations has become a generally accepted way to express political grievances, voice opposition, and challenge authorities." In this vein, following recent studies on protest behavior that employ the terms "protests" and "demonstrations" interchangeably (Norris et al. 2005; Norris et al. 2006; van Aelst and Walgrave 2001), we refer to the attendance of

[3] Norris (2009, 639 et seq.), for instance, challenges these labels and suggests a new distinction "between *citizen-oriented* action, relating mainly to elections and parties, and *cause-oriented* repertoires, which focus attention upon specific issues and policy concerns, exemplified by consumer politics, […] petitioning, demonstrations, and protests."

[4] Eisinger (1973, p. 13), however, draws a clear distinction between political protest and more "costly" forms such, as political violence.

Table 1 Direct democracy and protest in the Swiss cantons, 1999–2003

Canton	Direct democracy index 1999–2003	Direct democratic votes 1999–2003	Participated in demonstrations (%)	Number of respondents
Geneva	1.75	6.4	23.7	600
Ticino	2.25	2.2	15.7	562
Neuchâtel	2.40	0.8	32.0	50
Vaud	2.42	3.4	20.9	647
Fribourg	2.79	1.8	14.6	90
Berne	3.02	2	25.3	561
St. Gallen	3.47	2.2	15.8	133
Zurich	3.50	8.6	17.2	634
Valais	3.58	0.6	19.1	84
Jura	3.71	0.4	18.5	27
Thurgovia	4.33	2.2	20.3	69
Basel-Town	4.40	3.4	19.6	56
Lucerne	4.42	3.6	9.5	613
Nidwalden	4.44	1.2	11.4	35
Zug	4.45	3.4	7.9	38
Obwalden	4.63	1.8	2.9	34
Grisons	4.83	9.8	2.9	35
Schwyz	4.94	3.6	2.7	37
Uri	5.13	3.2	3.7	27
Schaffhausen	5.17	3.2	10.3	662
Appenzell Outer Rhodes	5.20	2.6	17.5	40
Solothurn	5.25	5.2	8.5	71
Appenzell Inner Rhodes	5.41	2.4	10.8	37
Argovia	5.45	8	9.5	645
Basel-Country	5.52	8.4	20.8	72
Glarus	5.70	7.8	3.1	32
Average	4.16	3.8	16.0	5891

Swiss cantons ordered according to direct democracy score for the years 1999–2003; yearly calculations by Fischer (2009). Direct democratic votes (popular initiatives and referendums) averaged per year for the years 1999–2003. Percentage of participants in demonstrations indicate percentage of respondents who answered "yes" to the questions in the Swiss Electoral Studies (Selects 2003) questionnaire: *In addition to elections and popular votes, there are also other political activities. I read some of them to you. Please tell me if you participated in each of these activities in the past five years. Attended a demonstration.* Average referring to total number of respondents, i.e., not weighted per canton

demonstrations as protest behavior.[5] As Table 1 shows, considerable variation exists between the cantons regarding the percentage of respondents per canton who attended a demonstration between 1999 and 2003. In some cases, variances of about 30 percentage points can be observed between the cantonal democracies. Because

[5] It has to be noted that our data from the Swiss Electoral Studies (Selects 2003) does not include any other items of the various forms of protest behavior mentioned above.

individuals in the Swiss cantons vary substantially in terms of their propensity to attend a demonstration, the question surfaces as to *why* these differences exist.

Theory and Hypotheses Regarding the Influence of Direct Democracy on Protest Behavior

This article evaluates whether direct democracy increases or decreases individual protest behavior. Viewed analytically, this inquiry forces us to take hierarchical structures into account, as the assumption is posited that a macro-level condition (direct democracy) is related to micro-level behavior (the decision to attend demonstrations).

Theoretically, interactions with one's social surroundings can shape individual choices; however, an individual's behavior can also be traced back solely to the observation of one's environment. A specific incentive offered by the individual's economic and socio-political surroundings can influence the individual to act in a particular manner (e.g., Huckfeldt et al. 1993; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987).[6] From the perspective of neo-institutionalism, political institutions have the ability to mold individual preferences and stimulate or limit behavioral options by means of certain incentive mechanisms (Dalton et al. 2009; Freitag and Stadelmann-Steffen 2010; Hall and Taylor 1996; Immergut 1998; Mayntz and Scharpf 1995; Offe 2007).[7] In general terms, neo-institutionalism regards institutions not only as dependent but also as independent variables (Mayntz and Scharpf 1995, p. 43). While "classical institutionalism is merely concerned with the description of political institutions and their interrelationships," in neo-institutionalism, institutions "are interpreted as structural incentives for political actions," thus shaping individual action (Kaiser 1997, p. 421).

How do these incentive mechanisms apply to the behavior of political participation in particular? Verba et al. (1995, p. 15) invert the question of participation and "ask instead why individuals do *not* take part in politics." Their answer is threefold: "because they can't; because they don't want to; or because nobody asked." In this vein, we argue that institutional arrangements (namely, direct democratic institutions) offer various channels of political participation by providing resources (people *can* participate), enabling engagement (people *want to*

[6] Institutions are of course the result of citizens' collective action and may therefore be endogenous to individual behavior over the long-run (Foweraker and Landman 1997). We argue, however, that institutional arrangements can still be seen as exogenous framework conditions that cannot be changed by an individual in the short and medium-run; instead, they influence individual preferences and behavior patterns (see Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987, p. 1200).

[7] This institutional approach is one of three accounts of protest behavior. Another approach centers around people's economic situations. If an individual personally experiences economic grievances, he or she is likely to protest. In particular, relative deprivation is seen as the driving force for protest (Gurr 1970). Additionally, a cultural approach can be identified that challenges the rational cost-benefit analysis of the economic view (Chong 1991). In that sense protest is a culturally inherited form of participation, and cultural differences account for differences in political participation such as protests (Hofstede 1991). In particular, the cultural resource of social (or interpersonal) trust is found to be associated with protest behavior (Benson and Rochon 2004; Winters 2008; Valencia et al. 2010).

participate), or facilitating opportunities (people are *asked to* participate). While the insights of neo-institutionalism and civic voluntarism provide the basic logic of institutional influence on political participation, they do not tell us the direction in which the influence of direct democracy effectively works. With respect to the influence of direct democracy on individual participation in demonstrations, two competing hypotheses can be formulated.

The first approach assumes that a culture of extensive direct democracy stimulates citizens' propensity to participate in demonstrations (*catalyst-hypothesis*).[8] In this view, not every individual is capable of expressing his or her preferences in the political process through unconventional participation. Without knowing anything or caring about politics, without contact with like-minded people, there is no reason why an individual should or could join protests. In fact, to engage in protests individuals must meet several requirements: For example, they need to have clear policy preferences—therefore they must have sufficient political knowledge as well as interest—they should be politically efficacious, trust in fellow protesters, and possess the ability to organize. All of these skills are empirically linked to direct democratic institutions, which have, in particular, been shown to exert an educative effect on their citizens (Matsusaka and Lupia 2004; Smith and Tolbert 2004; Tolbert and Smith 2005). Indeed, direct democratic institutions are able to "stimulate participation by energizing citizens with a sense of civic duty and political efficacy" (Smith and Tolbert 2004, p. 33). Simply because an individual in a direct democracy is more frequently and immediately exposed to political decisions than in a representative democracy, he or she is more likely to be exposed to news media reporting on the decision, and is thus more likely to learn about politics (Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000; Tolbert et al. 2003). The individual is also more likely to be part of political discussions and to get to know like-minded people, and consequently is more likely to feel efficacious in the political process (Bowler and Donovan 2002; Bühlmann 2007; a contrary is however found by Dyck and Lascher 2009). Ultimately, the individual is more likely to get involved and express preferences through protests. This empowering effect of direct democracy on the expression of preferences becomes particularly evident in the run-up to votes. Since decisions can be voted on by every individual (instead of representatives), lobbying efforts are directed at the general public, which is done best and most visibly through demonstrations. Again, the same argument can be formulated by the civic voluntarism rationale (Verba et al. 1995). People need resources, engagement, and to be recruited in order to be able to join protests. In that sense the educative mechanism provides first "skills to use time and

[8] This line of reasoning is in accordance with the views of the so-called "Progressive era reformers" (Smith and Tolbert 2004, p. 3). Here, direct democratic processes have an educative effect on the people (Garner 1907; Bryce 1910; Weyl 1912). More recent studies of the USA provide empirical evidence for positive effects on social participation (Tolbert et al. 2003; Smith and Tolbert 2004; Tolbert and Bowen 2008; Boehmke and Bowen 2010) and conventional political participation through voting (Tolbert et al. 2001; Tolbert and Smith 2005; Tolbert and Bowen 2008; and more recently and specifically Dyck and Seabrook 2010). Furthermore, mobilization effects on independent voters to cast their ballot (Donovan et al. 2009) and positive effects on political trust (Smith and Tolbert 2004), as well as social trust (Dyck 2008), political knowledge (Tolbert et al. 2003; Schlozman and Yohai 2008), and political support (Bühlmann 2007) can be shown.

money effectively"; second "interest in politics," "concern with public issues," "a belief that activity can make [little or no] difference," and "knowledge about the political process"; and third "networks [of *recruitment*] through which citizens are mobilized to politics" (Verba et al. 1995, p. 16). Put differently, in direct democracies people *can* protest, they *want to* protest, and they are *asked to* protest. From these assessments, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 The higher the degree of direct democracy, the more likely it is that an individual will participate in demonstrations.

The antithesis to these essentially positive conjectures would then suggest a negative relationship between direct democracy and protest behavior (*valve-hypothesis*). According to this approach direct democratic institutions are conceived as components of a particular *structure of political opportunities* (Eisinger 1973; Meyer 2004). Referring to Kitschelt (1986, p. 58), "political opportunity structures are comprised of specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others."

In this view, individuals possess policy preferences that they wish to see implemented. Therefore, they consider their repertoire of means to participate in the political process and to influence political decisions according to their preferences. Participatory institutions, such as direct democracy, channel the relationship between individuals and government, providing an environment that makes protests less likely. First and foremost, direct democracy as a participatory decision-making institution enriches the range of conventional political participation. If many opportunities for participation are offered, the political system is considered to be open to the input of preferences. Direct democracy therefore, represents political opportunity structures for conventional participation. Individuals will then use these institutions to influence political decisions (e.g., by popular initiatives or referendums) rather than embracing unconventional forms such as demonstrations: "In a highly open system, on the other hand, where government is not only responsive but anticipates needs and meets them, […], protest will be unnecessary. In an open system, groups have easy access to decision makers without resort to the drama of protest." (Eisinger 1973, p. 28).[9] In the same vein, Kitschelt (1986, p. 66) argues: "when political systems are open and weak, they invite *assimilative* strategies; movements attempt to work through established institutions because political opportunity structures offer multiple points of access. In contrast, when political systems are closed and have considerable capacities to ward off threats to the implementation of policies, movements are likely to adopt *confrontational*, disruptive strategies orchestrated outside established policy channels." In this regard, in direct democracies individuals *can* participate—in addition to elections—in other conventional forms through popular initiatives and referendums because they are *asked to* vote; hence, they *don't want to* participate in unconventional forms

[9] Eisinger (973, 27 et seq.) hypothesizes in fact a curve-linear relationship between openness of government and protest. In extremely closed systems, protest would be neither a viable nor a fruitful strategy. Arguably, however, such an authoritarian system that suppresses protests is not to be found in the Swiss context.

such as demonstrations. On the other hand, without direct democratic institutions people *can't* participate conventionally, and thus will *want to* do so unconventionally.[10]

In addition to this valve mechanism, direct democracy also fosters a more deliberative culture (Feld and Kirchgässner 2000). Kriesi and Wisler (1996, 37 et seq.) state in this respect that "availability of direct-democratic institutions contributes to the 'civilization' of political conflict." In this sense, it is not only actual use of direct democratic institutions that renders protest behavior unnecessary, but also the particular political environment of direct democracy. For instance, political elites in direct democracies are assumed to be more responsive to citizens' demands because they anticipate the use of referendums and initiatives. The mere presence of the institutions therefore provides an incentive for political elites to act responsively and make decisions closer to the median voter (Hug and Tsebelis 2002). Or as Mutz (2006, p. 3) points out, direct democracy may help develop a more deliberative, tolerant, and respectful environment while participation and political activism decline. Here, the presence of direct democratic institutions creates a deliberative atmosphere that discourages confrontational strategies such as protests. Taken together, the discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 The higher the degree of direct democracy, the more likely it is that an individual will abstain from participating in demonstrations.

Data, Methodological Approach, and Variables

In the following section, we test the derived hypotheses empirically. The dependent variable is the reported individual participation in demonstrations (see Table 1). These data were obtained from the 2003 Swiss Electoral Studies (Selects), specifically from responses to the following question: "*In addition to elections and popular votes, there are also other political activities. I read some of them to you. Please tell me if you participated in each of these activities in the past five years. Attended a demonstration.*" Being part of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) network, the Selects study was conducted through computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI) immediately after the Swiss National Election in October 2003. The response rate was 73.3% (Selb and Lachat 2004, p. 34). The final sample consists of 5,891 individuals in the 26 Swiss cantons.

We test the competing hypotheses about the effect of direct democracy on protest behavior in the context of the Swiss sub-national entities. In analytical terms, the Swiss cantons meet the requirements of a most-similar cases design: They exhibit a substantial degree of similarity with respect to consolidated structural elements and they differ considerably regarding the configuration of direct democratic institutions, as Table 1 shows (Fischer 2009; Stutzer 1999; Stutzer and Frey 2000; Trechsel and Serdült 1999). It is therefore potentially less difficult to create *ceteris*

[10] While only a special one, the most evident case would be when individuals protest against insufficient opportunities of participation or against representatives and their decisions. In direct democracies, on the other hand, such protest is not found (Opp 1996, p. 230).

paribus conditions for a systematic comparison of cantonal systems than for a cross-national comparison, since the cantons have many characteristics in common that can be treated as constants (Freitag 2005; Lijphart 2002; Vatter and Freitag 2007).

As indicated by the research question, we are dealing with hierarchical data structures, i.e., individuals nested within institutional contexts that are thought to exert an influence on them. We therefore apply random-intercept models, implying that individual behavior can vary between cantons (Jones 1997; Steenbergen and Jones 2002). Additionally, such a multilevel model allows for the modeling of macro-level characteristics (in the present case, the direct democratic context) that account for the variance at the macro-level (the variance between cantons). As the dependent variable is dichotomous, individual participation in demonstrations is transformed to a logit structure.

For the purpose of explaining individual participation in demonstrations, we integrate contextual as well as individual characteristics into the analysis. We use the values of the contextual factors measured prior to or throughout, but not after, the reported participation in demonstrations to assure that the potential cause precedes the effect.[11] In order to measure the *presence of direct democracy,* we use an index developed by Fischer (2009) as our explanatory variable (see Table 1; Appendix Tables 4 and 5). First suggested by Stutzer (1999), this index combines degrees of openness for each of the four direct democratic institutions: the constitutional initiative, the legislative initiative, the legislative referendum, and the fiscal referendum. Values between one and six reflect the legal requirements for each institution in terms of required signatures, time period to collect signatures, in the case of the legislative referendum, whether it is optional or mandatory, and for fiscal referendums, the financial threshold. The resulting four sub-indices are averaged into one index. In other words, some cantons require many signatures, offer only a short time period in which to collect them, do not have a mandatory (only an optional) legislative referendum, and a high financial threshold. Such cantons thus exhibit high legal requirements and score low (i.e., close to one) on the index of direct democracy. Cantons with low legal requirements score high (i.e., close to six).[12] From the discussion above, it follows that direct democracy also includes another dimension different from the mere institutional presence. We measure the *use of direct democracy* by averaging the number of all cantonal initiatives and referendums per year (Année politique Suisse). We test both instances of direct democracy separately to ensure a comprehensive account of direct democracy and to strengthen our empirical investigation.[13]

However, as other theoretical arguments claim, there are several alternative explanations as to why people protest that vary systematically across and within cantons. We analyze the effect of direct democratic institutions while holding other factors constant, thereby ruling out spurious relationships. As mentioned above, in addition to our institutional perspective, there are important individual characteristics

[11] Moreover, one can argue logically that it is the more stable ("sticky") contextual condition, which causally affects the more volatile ("loose") individual behavior, and not vice versa (Davis 1985).

[12] Coding for thresholds and corresponding index points is described in detail by Stutzer and Frey (2000).

[13] We are grateful to our anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

that contribute to protest behavior. We base our selection of variables on the prominent models in the protest literature.[14] Protest participation can be explained by a number of different theories: by grievance theory (Gurr 1970), by a specific set of political values (Inglehart 1990), or more comprehensively, by the aforementioned civic-voluntarism model (Verba et al. 1995). From the relevant literature we derive individual variables that are commonly associated with increased protest behavior (e.g., Benson and Rochon 2004; Norris et al. 2005). In general, men, younger people, and people with higher education are assumed to protest more.[15] The same applies to more trusting persons and persons with more post-materialistic values as well as a left-leaning ideology. We also consider people who favor a green party, are members in a labor union, or are employed in the agricultural sector as more likely to protest because they represent the most prominent protest groups in Switzerland. To sum up, the variables sex, age, education, trust in others, post-materialism, ideology, green party attachment, union member, and agricultural profession are generated from the same 2003 Selects data set and included in the analysis.

Similarly, we account for alternative explanations on the contextual level. It could be the case that the variation in protest behavior is only due to systematic differences in protest related factors between cantons. Therefore, we selected control variables identified in the relevant literature as potentially influential to protest behavior on a contextual level (e.g., Winters 2008). In this sense, people living in more affluent and urban cantons are thought to have more opportunities to protest and are thus more likely to do so. Furthermore, protest should be more likely where social movements have been strong and successful. Historically in Switzerland, traditional social movements are strongly tied to labor issues and unions (Hutter and Giugni 2009). New social movements are strongly tied to environmental issues and the success of green parties (Kriesi 1982; Zwicky 1984, p. 105). Moreover, when considering major protest events (with more than 1,000 participants) we find a highly uneven distribution: by far most protest events take place in Berne, Zurich, and Geneva. Since the costs of participation decrease as the distance between the protester's home and the protest decreases, we include the distance to these cities as a control variable.[16] Finally, people in the German-speaking part of Switzerland are thought to be more likely to protest than people in the Latin language areas. These language regions have shown to be important factors in Swiss politics, as they coincide with different concepts of democracy (Freitag and Stadelmann-Steffen 2010, p. 477). Moreover, language regions are not only correlated with the extent of direct democracy, but residents also generally differ in terms of political culture and, in particular, with regard to their perceptions

[14] For an overview see for example Dalton et al. (2009) or Opp (1996).

[15] Level of education is highly correlated with personal income, but the latter contains more missing values. To avoid multicollinearity and to keep as many observations as possible, we use the level of education in our analysis.

[16] We use data of protest events between 1999 and 2003 with at least 1,000 protesters (Année politique Suisse). In addition, there exists a highly significant and strongly negative effect ($\beta = -11.4$; SE = 3.3) of direct democracy on the number of major protest events in the Swiss Cantons ($n = 26$), even after introducing our (contextual) control variables ($R^2 = 0.58$). In other words, the extent of direct democracy is related to fewer protest events in the Swiss cantons.

Table 2 Random effects of protest behavior

	Empty model	Individual model (1)	Direct democracy model Presence (2)	Direct democracy model Use (3)
Context variance	0.229	0.203	0.059	0.180
Intraclass-correlation	0.065	0.058	0.018	0.052
$-2 \times$ log likelihood	5070.69	3806.80	3793.86	3803.44

of representative and direct democracy. Whereas the German-speaking cantons mainly display an extensive degree of direct democracy, French and Italian-speaking cantons offer only restrictive access to direct democratic instruments and are more oriented toward a representative model of democracy (Stadelmann-Steffen and Freitag 2011, p. 535).[17] Altogether, the contextual variables primary national income (i.e., income of all households) per capita, urbanization, share of union members, strength of green parties, distance to major protest city, and share of German-speaking population are generated from official statistics and included as controls. More detailed information about the variables (their operationalizations and data sources) can be found in Appendix Tables 4 and 5 presents descriptive statistics of all variables.

Empirical Findings

In this section we present a two-stage procedure to examine the relationship between the direct democratic context and an individual's participation in demonstrations. Some preliminary analyses demonstrate that individual participation in demonstrations systematically varies between the cantons, even when controlling for individual variables (Table 2). Apparently, there are contextual differences that affect protest behavior, which confirms that it is not only theoretically, but also methodologically appropriate to model a contextual effect of direct democracy on individual protest behavior. Moreover, the introduction of the (contextual) direct democracy variables greatly reduces contextual variance. The independent variables of the presence and use of direct democracy therefore explains a substantial part of protest variance between cantons. In particular, the *presence* of direct democracy (2) is able to reduce context variance as well as intraclass correlation almost to zero.

Now that we have established that direct democracy does exert an influence on protest behavior, we must now inquire into the direction of the effect and whether it holds under controlling factors. To answer these questions we turn to results of the

[17] In this respect, Ladner (2007) finds both a greater number and increased importance of local parliaments in French and Italian-speaking cantons than in German-speaking cantons. Knüsel (1994) argues that language regions are influenced by their respective neighboring countries: The representative model of democracy in Italy and France delegates responsibility and power away from the individual to the unitary state. In German-speaking cantons, on the other hand, citizens embody the idea of a "small" state and are thus left with more power and responsibility.

above specified random-intercept logit model. In the next analytical step we present the basic model containing the degree of direct democracy and individual controls. We then add the controlling contextual variables to expand the model (Table 3). The main results can be described as follows:

- First and foremost, with regard to our main hypotheses, the estimations seem to confirm the negative effect of direct democracy on protest behavior. In other words, we can observe a trade-off between cantonal direct democratic culture and individual participation in demonstrations: The higher the degree of direct democracy, the greater the likelihood that an individual will abstain from participating in demonstrations. Most notably, this is true for both dimensions of direct democracy: its presence as well as its use. We find no support for a positive, educative effect of direct democracy in Switzerland; rather, a strong direct democratic culture is associated with decreased participation in demonstrations, all other things held constant. In both estimations, controlling for individual and contextual factors, this effect is highly significant. Again, institutional presence and the use of direct democracy are able to explain a fair amount of the variance of protest behavior. Results in Table 3, however, are difficult to interpret in terms of effect size. For that reason we calculate predicted probabilities to engage in protest given the degree of direct democracy. Figure 1 shows the relationship and corresponding confidence intervals, with controlling covariates fixed at their means. Under these conditions, the probability of attending a demonstration decreases from 18.5% in the canton with the fewest direct democratic institutions to 6.5% in the canton with the most direct democracy (Graph on the left). This is a reduction of roughly 65%. Interestingly, size of the effect is the same going from the canton with the least use (18.1%) to the canton with the highest use (6.6%) of direct democracy (Graph on the right.). That means direct democracy in Switzerland reduces the probability of protesting by nearly two-thirds.
- Second, most of the individual control variables are significant and perform in the theoretically hypothesized direction. A higher likelihood to protest is associated with younger age, higher education, more post-materialist values, attachment to a green party, left ideology, union members, greater trust in others, and agricultural professions. These relationships remain significant after introducing contextual control variables.[18]
- Third, with regard to the contextual controls, results of the use and the presence of direct democracy are somewhat ambiguous. In the slightly improved model (4), a canton's percentage of labor union members in the work force has a significant effect. Like the respective individual control for union membership, individuals in cantons with a high share of union members are more likely to protest. Marginally significant, the share of the German-speaking population is

[18] In analyses not documented here, we tested further individual variables that could be connected to protest behavior, namely variables for political trust and political knowledge. These variables are not significant in our model, do not change the model estimates, and are therefore excluded. These results are available from the authors upon request.

Table 3 Random-intercept logit models

	(1) Individual model	(2) Direct democracy models	(3)	(4) Full models	(5)
Individual effects					
Constant	−0.70**	0.38	−0.40	−1.24*	−1.82*
	(0.29)	(0.36)	(0.33)	(0.70)	(1.00)
Age	−0.04***	−0.04***	−0.04***	−0.04***	−0.04***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Sex	−0.02	−0.02	−0.01	−0.02	−0.02
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Education	0.06***	0.06***	0.06***	0.05***	0.06***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Post-materialism	0.33***	0.34***	0.33***	0.33***	0.33***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Green party attachment	0.48**	0.47**	0.48**	0.48**	0.47**
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.20)
Left–right placement	−0.25***	−0.25***	−0.25***	−0.25***	−0.25***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Union member	0.89***	0.88***	0.88***	0.89***	0.89***
	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.10)
Trust in others	0.06***	0.06***	0.06***	0.06***	0.06***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Agricultural profession	0.68***	0.69***	0.68***	0.69***	0.68***
	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
Contextual effects					
Direct democracy *presence*		**−0.27*** **		**−0.30*** **	
		(0.06)		**(0.08)**	
Direct democracy *use*			**−0.08***		**−0.12*** **
			(0.04)		**(0.04)**
Share German speaking				0.43*	−0.06
				(0.25)	(0.26)
Urbanization				−0.00	0.01
				(0.00)	(0.00)
National income				0.00	0.00
				(0.00)	(0.00)
Share union members				0.05***	0.03
				(0.02)	(0.02)
Green party strength				0.05**	0.07**
				(0.02)	(0.03)
Distance to major protest city				−0.00	−0.00
				(0.00)	(0.00)
Random effects					
Context variance	0.20	0.06	0.18	0.00	0.02

Table 3 continued

	(1) Individual model	(2) Direct democracy models	(3)	(4) Full models	(5)
$-2 \times$ log likelihood	3806.80	3793.86	3803.44	3784.42	3779.94
N/n	5,169/26	5,169/26	5,169/26	5,169/26	5,169/26

Bold values refer to the independent variables of direct democracy

Standard errors in *parentheses* *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

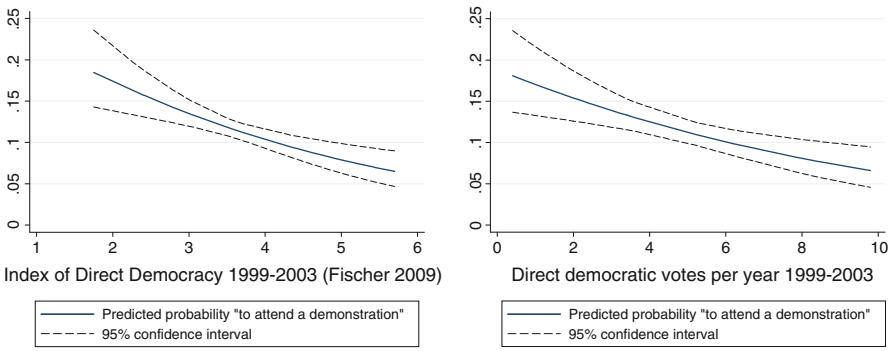

Fig. 1 Predicted probability of attending demonstrations. *Note*: The graph on the *left* shows predicted probability given the *presence* of direct democracy (based on model 4); the graph on the *right* given the *use* of direct democracy (based on model 5). Control variables are set to their means

also positively associated with a higher likelihood of protesting. Significant in both models (4 and 5) is the effect of the strength of Green parties: Individuals are more likely to protest where Green parties are stronger. Although the distance from the cantonal capital to the closest major protest event, urbanization, and national income are not significant, these variables represent important controls and are therefore left in the model.[19]

Of course, the results of the full models (4 and 5) require further testing. As we are dealing with a very small number of cases, level-two units (here, cantons) can quickly exert a large influence on the estimation of the parameters. Regression diagnostics were developed to measure various ways in which a regression relation might be largely dependent on one or two observations. Particularly in small samples, there is the danger that the results achieved might be dominated by a few observations, thereby casting doubt on the reliability of a regression estimate and the conclusions made thereupon. Therefore, we re-estimated our model multiple

[19] We also tested further contextual indicators of our individual variables, namely variables for age distribution and education pattern per canton. Again, these variables are not significant in our model, do not change the model estimates, and are therefore excluded. Moreover, further analyses of potential cross-level interactions between direct democratic settings and individual accounts of protest behavior (not presented here) do not show significant effects, and thus do not support the educative reasoning. These results are available from the authors upon request.

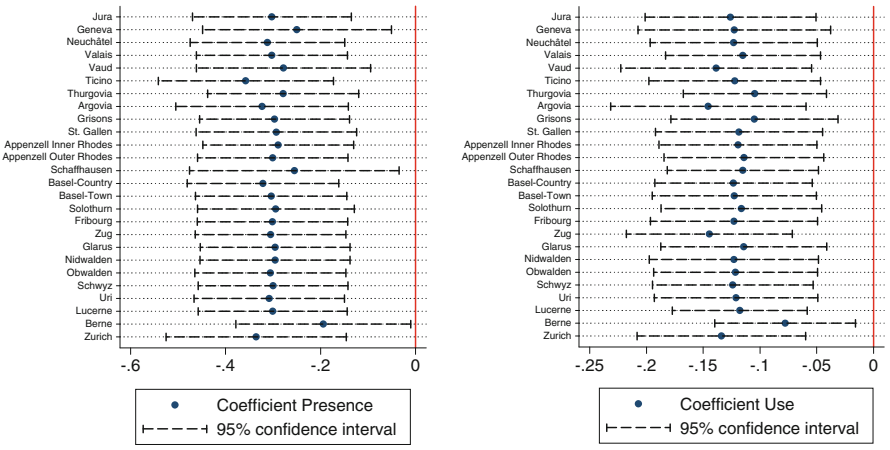

Fig. 2 Effect of direct democracy to the exclusion of respective canton. *Note*: The graph on the *left* shows coefficients and confidence intervals for the *presence* of direct democracy (based on model 4) excluding single cantons; the graph on the *right* show the *use* of direct democracy (based on model 5)

times, each time excluding a single canton (and its respondents). Although this kind of manual jackknifing represents a strict test for influential cases (excluding in some cases several hundred observations), the direct democracy variable remains significant in all 26 separate models. Figure 2 illustrates the direct democracy coefficients in the 26 separate models to the exclusion of a single canton. Even without the most influential canton Berne (and the capital of Switzerland), we find that the confidence interval do not include zero. Furthermore, we also applied a jackknife estimation of standard errors, which also resulted in significant coefficients for direct democracy. Based on these results, we are fairly confident about the present findings.[20]

Conclusion

This paper began with the observation of two seemingly contradictory trends in current events. On the one hand, increased protest activity is accompanied by a call for more direct democratic participation. On the other hand, direct democratic

[20] Although our empirical results clearly favor the hypothesized negative relationship, they do not clarify the mechanism: is the decline in protest behavior due to the deliberative environment of direct democracy or is it because citizens use direct democratic votes as a valve? As evidence for the valve effect, the degree of direct democracy should also be positively correlated with individual participation in popular votes. In further analyses of the same models (not documented here), the direct democracy variable indeed exerts a highly significant and positive effect on individual participation in popular votes. These results are available from the authors upon request. With this in mind, our results seem to support the argument that direct democratic institutions indeed act as valve. As we detail below, however, more empirical investigation is needed to scrutinize the underlying causal mechanism.

decisions are every once in a while accompanied by protests. Given these observations, we tested the direction of the effect of direct democratic institutions on protest behavior. Do they act as valve, integrating preferences and emotions into the political process and thus rendering protests unnecessary? Or do they catalyze preferences and emotions by empowering citizens to engage and thus stimulate protests in the first place? Surprisingly, no systematic empirical evaluation of this relationship had been undertaken. In fact, theoretically, strong cases for both arguments can be made. Our contribution juxtaposes both arguments and further develops their theoretical foundations. To arrive at an answer, however, we model the relationship and test it empirically in the context of the Swiss cantons. Here the result is clear: Direct democratic institutions significantly reduce protest behavior. The effect is not only significant when controlling for individual and contextual effects, but is also substantial in its size. Direct democratic institutions seem to be able to act as political opportunity structures. They provide people with institutional means of participation and decision-making. Consequently, citizens do not feel the need to protest their causes. Viewed the other way around, if direct democratic institutions are absent, people lack the opportunity to participate conventionally, and thus see no other option than to engage in protests.

Regarding the varieties of neo-institutionalism (historical, sociological, and rational-choice perspectives), which differ in how they define institutions in detail, the methodologies they use, and on how institutions shape actors' preferences (e.g., Hall and Taylor 1996; Sørensen and Torfing 2007), our data do not however allow us to differentiate between the different schools of thought in our analysis. Nevertheless, according to some prominent Swiss scholars, there is at the very least some evidence that in Switzerland, direct democracy is indeed a deeply rooted trait that is culturally inherited by the cantons and their citizens. These scholars emphasize the extent to which individuals turn to established routines or familiar patterns of behavior to attain their purposes (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008; Linder 2005; Vatter 2002). This account reinforces the abovementioned findings about language regions, democratic institutions, and democratic culture by Ladner (2007) and Knüsel (1994). Apparently, there is a fundamental relationship between the type of democracy and the appreciation of direct democracy in a canton. While in more direct democratic, German-speaking cantons people tend to think that popular votes have a greater influence on politics than elections, in the French and Italian-speaking cantons, which are much more oriented toward a purely representative model of democracy, people do not support this view.[21]

Overall, our analysis of the effects of direct democracy on protest behavior contributes to and enriches the global dialogue on the introduction of direct

[21] With regard to other cantonal idiosyncrasies, it could also be that it is not direct democracy *per se* that reduces protests, but rather that direct democratic cantons are more likely to pass laws that make protests unnecessary—for example by recognizing minority rights. In order to rule out such indirect effects we correlate the direct democracy measure with data on cantonal recognition of religious minorities by Christmann (2010, p. 21). We find an insignificant and low (0.2) correlation, indicating that direct democratic cantons are not more likely to pass laws that effectively reduce or suppress protests.

democratic procedures (Scarrow 2001). From a normative point of view, it could be concluded from our results that extending direct democratic institutions is desirable. Lowering institutional barriers for direct democratic action is a means to reduce protests and demonstrations and to foster a deliberative discourse. In this regard, we confirm Kriesi and Wisler's (1996, 37 et seq.) statement that direct democracy is able to civilize political conflict. We must, however, underscore that our results are only suggestive and explorative. Although they are a step in the right direction, we need more investigations that empirically scrutinize the causal mechanism between direct democracy and protest behavior in order to provide a more confident base if we indeed wish to speak of a causal relationship. Complementary to our quantitative analysis, qualitative studies are needed to confirm the causal mechanism that our cross-sectional design merely assumed and tested. This certainly is a limitation of our study that we would like to address in future research.

Additionally, the general problem of how to approach the arguments presented in a comparative perspective remains. Although the Swiss cantons differ in terms of local democracy, Switzerland in general has a long tradition in direct democratic practice. Together with its unique parliamentary model, it has developed a consensus oriented spirit that allows for a very deliberate exercise of direct democracy. This is probably necessary to make actual use of it as opportunity structure. We therefore need to acknowledge the socializing potential of direct democracy. Put differently, socialization in direct democracies allows citizens to perceive direct democratic institutions as political opportunity structures in the first place. In a completely different context, however, the introduction of direct democratic instruments could—at least initially—still lead to catalyzing effects. For this reason, we need to further investigate the "mutual" relationship of direct democratic institutions and deliberative democratic culture (Foweraker and Landman 1997), as well as study the effect of direct democratic institutions on protest behavior in other contexts. In the same vein, international comparison of this effect would be recommended. At present, an empirical analysis of this kind at the national level appears nearly impossible, as there are but a scant handful of comparable cases. Against this background, the tendency in western democracies to redesign institutions in ways that give citizens more opportunities to exercise direct control over political decision-making may provide new prospects for future research (Uba and Uggla 2011). Our contribution may serve as starting point with a clear message: Where there is direct democracy, there is less protest.

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Appendix

See Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4 List of variables and their operationalization

Variable	Hypothesis	Operationalization/source
Dependent variable		
Individual participation in demonstration		In addition to elections and popular votes, there are also other political activities. I read some of them to you. Please tell me if you participated in each of these activities in the past five years. *Attended a demonstration*. (0 = No; 1 = Yes)
Independent variables—individual level		
Age	Younger individuals are more likely to demonstrate than older ones	Age (in years) of the respondent interviewed
Sex	Men participate in demonstrations more frequently than women.	Dummy: 1 = men; 2 = women
Educational	The higher an individual's level of education, the more likely he/she is to participate in demonstrations	Respondent's highest completed level of education, ranging from 0 = no education to 12 = University degree
Post-materialism	Individuals with more post-materialistic views are more likely to participate in demonstrations	Post-materialism score, ranging from 1 = Materialist to 4 = Post-materialist
Attachment to green parties	Individuals who feel a strong attachment to one of the Green parties are more likely to participate in demonstrations	Feeling close to any particular party. Dummy: 0 = other/no party; 1 = Green party
Left–right placement	Individuals who place themselves further left are more likely to participate in demonstrations than individuals who are further right	Self-placement on ideological scale, ranging from 0 = left to 10 = right
Union member	Union members are more likely to participate in demonstrations than non-union members	Dummy: 0 = no member; 1 = member in union or workers' organization
Trust in others	Individuals who place trust in others are more likely to participate in demonstrations than individuals who do not	General trust question, ranging from 0 = Can't be careful enough; 10 = Most people can be trusted
Agricultural profession	Individuals employed in the agricultural sector are more likely to participate in demonstrations than those who are not	Current profession of respondent. Dummy: 0 = non-agricultural profession; 1 = agricultural profession

Table 4 continued

Variable	Hypothesis	Operationalization/source
Independent variables—contextual level		
Direct democracy *presence*	The higher the presence of direct democracy, the greater the likelihood that an individual will participate/abstain from participating in demonstrations	Degree of institutional openness of direct democracy, average 1999–2003 (Fischer 2009)
Direct democracy *use*	The higher the use of direct democratic instruments, the greater the likelihood that an individual will participate/abstain from participating in demonstrations	Number of direct democratic votes (initiatives and referendums), average 1999–2003 (Année politique Suisse)
Share German speaking	The likelihood of individual protest participation is higher in cantons with a high share of non-German speaking population	Share of German speaking population per canton in 2000 (www.bfs.admin.ch)
Urbanization	The higher the degree of urbanization, the more likely an individual is to participate in demonstrations	Degree of urbanization in % in 2001 (www.badac.ch)
National income	The lower the national income, the more likely an individual is to participate in demonstrations	Primary national income of households per resident in SFr, average 1999-2003 (www.badac.ch)
Share of labor union members	The higher the share of labor union members in the work force, the more likely an individual is to participate in demonstrations.	Percentage of labor union members in the work force in 2000 (www.sgb.ch) (www.bakbasel.ch)
Green party strength	The stronger the Green party in a canton, the more likely an individual is to participate in demonstrations	Share of votes for the Green party in the 2003 cantonal elections (www.badac.ch)
Distance to major protest city	The closer to a city where most major protest events take place, the more likely an individual is to participate in demonstrations	Distance in (street) kilometers from respondent's canton's capital to the closet major protest city (Berne, Zurich, or Geneva) (www.maps.google.com)

Source is specified only for the contextual variables. All individual variables are taken from the 2003 Selects data

Table 5 Descriptive statistics of variables

Variable	*N*	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Dependent variable					
Protest behavior	5883	0.16	0.37	0	1
Independent variables—individual level					
Age	5891	51.23	17.08	18	98
Sex	5891	1.55	0.50	1	2
Education	5846	6.04	3.38	0	12
Post-materialism	5594	2.58	0.97	1	4
Green party attachment	5891	0.03	0.16	0	1
Left–right placement	5444	5.06	2.33	0	10
Union member	5880	0.17	0.37	0	1
Trust in others	5836	5.64	2.51	0	10
Agricultural profession	5891	0.02	0.14	0	1
Independent variables—contextual level					
Direct democracy *presence*	26	4.16	1.16	1.75	5.7
Direct democracy *use*	26	3.89	2.75	0.4	9.8
Share German speaking	26	0.67	0.35	0.04	0.94
Urbanization	26	54.63	30.78	0	100
National income	26	42690	6251	32688	59500
Share union members	26	8.49	6.36	1.07	30.18
Green party strength	26	3.58	3.92	0	11.2
Distance to major protest city	26	66.96	41.17	0	178

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